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ABSTRACT

Challenging the prevailing belief that the first 3 years of a child's life comprise the most critical period for development, this book maintains that although there is valid scientific evidence for the existence of critical periods, the same research points to learning and development occurring throughout life. The book asserts that too many people have seen the first 3 years as the main opportunity to shape children's futures and that this overemphasis contributes to the detriment of long-term parental and educational responsibilities. Chapter 1 of the book presents the 3-strand theme evident in popular literature on the brain and early child development and discusses how they have been used in policy documents such as "Starting Points" and in the "I Am Your Child" campaign. These three strands are: (1) rapid growth of synapses during infancy and toddlerhood; (2) critical periods in development; and (3) the role of enriched environments in enhancing brain development. Chapter 2 traces the development of infant determinism. Chapter 3 explores what neuroscientists know about rapid synapse development during the early years. Chapter 4 discusses the current neurobiological understanding of critical periods and what critical periods mean for child care and development. Chapter 5 summarizes the research cn enriched environments and examines its implications for early childhood education and lifelong learning. Chapter 6 concludes that the "I Am Your Child" movement and related literature oversimplify, misinterpret, and confuse what is known about early brain development. Implications of these problems for child rearing, child care, and public policy are also discussed. Each chapter contains references. (KB)

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